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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000628

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, INR/NESA
NSC FOR E. MILLARD

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [MOPS](#) [EAID](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: Sri Lanka: Under pressure from the main LTTE organization, forces of rebel commander Karuna buckle

Refs: (A) Colombo - SA/INS 04-13-04 class email
- (B) Colombo 620, and previous

(U) Classified by Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead.
Reasons 1.5 (b, d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The forces of dissident eastern LTTE commander Karuna have buckled in the face of the offensive launched by the main LTTE organization on April 9. There is word that Karuna's forces have retreated and that hundreds of them have apparently surrendered without a fight. Karuna's precise whereabouts are not known at this time. With the ebb in the fighting, the humanitarian situation appears to be improving. Although Karuna may still have some forces with him, the main LTTE seems very close to re-establishing its dominance in Tamil areas of the east. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) COLLAPSE OF KARUNA'S FORCES: The forces of dissident Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) commander Karuna appear to be buckling in the face of the offensive launched by the main LTTE organization on April 9. (Per Ref B, early April 9, the LTTE attacked Karuna's forces arrayed near the Verugal river, which straddles the border area separating Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts. The LTTE attack was highly coordinated and included a seaborne assault.) According to recent reports on the pro-Tiger website "TamilNet," the main LTTE faction had captured as of April 13 most of the areas of the east formerly claimed by Karuna, including several fortified camps. Mission has heard information from several sources that tends to confirm the TamilNet claims, and it appears that the main LTTE organization has re-established control of Tamil areas in Batticaloa District and in much of Ampara District.

13. (C) At this point, many of Karuna's troops have either surrendered to the main LTTE, or have dropped their weapons and returned to their home villages. Given the fact that there have been no reports of fighting between the factions since April 10, it is not clear exactly why so many of Karuna's troops have given up the fight. Some press reports have suggested that Karuna, in a bid to avert further bloodshed, ordered at least some of his forces to demobilize. At the same time, although there appears to have been something of a ceasefire in place between the factions due to the Tamil New Year holiday, forces loyal to the main LTTE organization have fanned out across the east in small groups. By moving to points in the east so quickly and with apparent impunity, the main LTTE organization appears to have gained the decisive military edge, which probably helped convince Karuna's forces that further resistance was not wise, thus precipitating the surrenders.

14. (C) KARUNA'S WHEREABOUTS UNKNOWN: Amid a swirl of rumors, Karuna's exact whereabouts are not known. There are reports that Karuna along with the remnants of his forces may have retreated into jungles located in northern Ampara District. There are other reports that he is deep in the Thoppigala jungle which is located due west of Batticaloa city. In TamilNet postings, the main LTTE has asserted that Karuna is now under the protection of the Sri Lankan military. Most Sri Lankan military sources, however, have not confirmed these reports. When queried, Agnes Bragadottir, the spokesperson of the Norwegian-run Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), told poloff on April 13 that the SLMM was also unsure of Karuna's whereabouts. Late April 14, DAO received word of an emergency meeting at the Joint Operations Headquarters of the Sri Lankan military, possibly dealing with Karuna.

15. (C) The Ambassador spoke to Norwegian Ambassador Hans Brattskar on April 12 about the situation in the east. Brattskar confirmed that he had no firm word regarding Karuna's location. He noted that trying to get Karuna out of the country would be extremely difficult should the matter come up. UNHCR, for

example, would not be able to assist Karuna because of his very poor human rights record.

16. (SBU) HUMANITARIAN SITUATION UPDATE: With the ebb in the fighting, the humanitarian situation in the east appears to be on the upswing. From what Mission understands, the fighting on April 9-10 displaced approximately 3,000 people in Batticaloa District. (This figure on displacements only involves those who have asked for assistance and the overall figure may be higher.) The Sri Lanka Red Cross and Tamil Rehabilitation Organization, a pro-LTTE NGO, are working to provide relief to the displaced. In the meantime, contacts in the east report that many of those individuals who fled the fighting earlier have now returned to their homes. In addition, in an unexpected gesture, the main faction of the LTTE also released approximately 150 child soldiers who had previously been in Karuna's armed forces. The children were returned to their families on April 12 with UNICEF's assistance.

17. (C) COMMENT: The GSL continues to keep out of the situation in the east. This is a net positive because if the government interferes militarily on Karuna's side it would almost certainly provoke an angry response by the main LTTE. This, in turn, might negatively impact the peace process. That said, if Karuna tries to take refuge in a Sri Lankan military base, it would seem inhumane if the GSL did not allow him in given that his certain sentence if captured by the main LTTE is a brutal death. Overall, although Karuna may still have some forces with him, the main LTTE seems to be very close to re-establishing its dominance in Tamil areas of the east. END COMMENT.

18. (U) Minimize considered.

LUNSTEAD